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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in the Paul VI Hall, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian, the Pope focused on his recent Apostolic Journey in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in South Sudan.

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present. He then made an appeal for the populations of Turkey and Syria, struck by a devastating earthquake that has caused thousands of deaths and casualties.

The General Audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the apostolic blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last week I visited two African countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. I thank God for permitting me to make this long-desired journey. Two "dreams": to visit the Congolese people, custodians of an immense country, the green heart of Africa: together with Amazonia, they are the two lungs of the world. A land rich in resources and bloodied by a war that never ends, because there is always someone to fan the flames. And to visit the South Sudanese people, in a pilgrimage of peace together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator General of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields: we went together to bear witness that it is possible, and a duty, to collaborate in diversity, especially if one shares faith in Jesus Christ.

The first three days I was in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I renew my gratitude to

the President and to the other leaders of the country for the welcome they accorded me. Immediately after my arrival, at the Presidential Palace, I was able to address a message to the nation: the Congo is like a diamond, for her nature, her resources, and especially for her people; but this diamond has become a source of contention, of violence, and paradoxically of the impoverishment of the people. It is a dynamic that is also found in other African regions, and which applies in general to the continent: a continent that has been colonized, exploited, plundered. In the face of all this I said two words. The first is negative: "*Enough!*" Stop exploiting Africa! I have said several times that in the collective unconscious there is, "Africa must be exploited": enough of this! I have said that. The second is positive: *together*, together with dignity, all together, and with mutual respect, together in the name of Christ, our hope, to go forward. Do not exploit, and go forward together.

And in the name of Christ, we gathered for the great Eucharistic celebration. Still in Kinshasa, various meetings then took place: with the victims of the violence in the east of the country, the region that has for years been torn apart by war between armed groups manoeuvred by economic and political interests. I was not able to go to Goma. People live in fear and insecurity, sacrificed on the altar of illicit deals. I heard the shocking testimonies of some victims, especially women, who placed weapons and other instruments of death at the foot of the cross. With them, I said "no" to violence, "no" to resignation, "yes" to reconciliation and hope. They have suffered a great deal, and continue to suffer.

I then met with the representatives of the various charitable organizations present in the country, to thank them and encourage them. Their work with the poor and for the poor does not make any noise, but day by day it makes the common good grow. Charitable initiatives must always be first and foremost for development, not only for aid but for development. Aid yes, but development.

There was an exciting moment with Congolese young people and catechists in the stadium. It was like an immersion in the present, projected towards the future. Think of the strength of renewal that can lead that new generation of Christians, formed and inspired by the joy of the Gospel! I indicated five paths to them, to the young: prayer, community, honesty, forgiveness and service. For the young people of the Congo, I said: your path is this: pray, community life, honesty, forgiveness and service. May the Lord hear their cry, that invokes justice.

Then, in the Cathedral of Kinshasa, I met with priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and seminarians. There are many of them, and they are young, because vocations are plentiful: it is a grace of God. I urged them to be servants of the people as witnesses of Christ's love, overcoming three temptations: spiritual mediocrity, worldly comfort and superficiality. Which are temptations, I would say, that are universal for seminarians and priests. Certainly, spiritual mediocrity, when a priest succumbs to mediocrity, is sad: worldly comfort, that is, worldliness, which is one of the worst evils that can befall the Church; and superficiality. Finally, with the Congolese bishops I shared the joy and hardship of pastoral service. I invited them to let themselves be comforted by God's closeness, and to be prophets for the people, with the strength of the Word of God, to be signs of how the Lord is, of the Lord's attitude towards us: compassion, closeness, tenderness. They are three ways … the way the Lord is with us: he draws close to us – proximity – with compassion and with tenderness. I asked this of the priests and bishops.

Then, the second part of the journey took place in Juba, capital of South Sudan, a state that was born in 2011. This visit had a very special character, expressed by the motto that echoed the words of Jesus: "I pray for all to be one" (cf. *Jn* 17:21). Indeed, it was an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace, made together with the leaders of two Churches historically present in that land: the Anglican Communion and the Church of Scotland. It was the culmination of a journey undertaken some years ago, when we gathered in Rome in 2019, with the South Sudanese leaders, to take on the commitment to overcome conflict and to build peace. In 2019 there was a spiritual retreat here, in the Curia, with all these politicians, with all these people aspiring to positions, some of them enemies, but they were all at the retreat. And this gave the strength to go forward. Unfortunately, the reconciliation process has not advanced much, and the nascent South Sudan is a victim of the old logic of power and rivalry, which produces war, violence, refugees and internally displaced persons. I am very thankful to Mr. President for the welcome he gave me and for how he is trying to manage this path, which is not at all easy, say "no" to corruption and to arms trafficking, and "yes" to encounter and dialogue. And this is shameful: many so-called "civilized" countries offer aid to South Sudan, and this aid consists of weapons, weapons, weapons, to

foment war. This is shameful. And yes, pushing forward saying “no” to corruption and to arms trafficking, and “yes” to encounter and dialogue. Only in this way will there be development, will people be able to work in peace, the sick be cured, and children go to school.

The ecumenical nature of the visit to South Sudan was manifested in particular in the prayer meeting held together with our Anglican brothers and those of the Church of Scotland. Together we listened to the Word of God, together we raised prayers of praise, supplication and intercession. In a reality as highly conflictual as that of South Sudan, this sign is fundamental, and not to be taken for granted, because unfortunately there are those who abuse the name of God to justify violence and oppression.

Brothers and sisters, South Sudan is a country of around eleven million inhabitants – it is tiny! – of whom, as a result of the armed conflicts, two million are internally displaced and as many have fled to neighbouring countries. Therefore, I wished to meet a large group of internally displaced persons, to listen to them and to make them feel Christ’s closeness. Indeed, the Churches and organizations of Christian inspiration are on the first line next to these poor people, who have lived for years in IDP camps. In particular I addressed women – there are good women there! – who are the force that can transform the country, and I encouraged everyone to be seeds of a new South Sudan, without violence, reconciled and pacified.

Then, in the meeting with the pastors and consecrated persons of the local Church, we looked at Moses as a model of obedience to God and perseverance in intercession.

And in the Eucharistic celebration, the final act of the visit to South Sudan and of the entire journey, I echoed the Gospel, encouraging Christians to be “salt and light” in that sorely troubled land. God places his hope not in the great and the powerful, but in the small and the humble. And this is God’s way of going.

I thank the authorities of South Sudan, Mr. President, the organizers of the journey and all those who invested their effort, their work, so that the trip could go well. I thank my brothers, Justin Welby and Iain Greenshields, for having accompanied me on this ecumenical journey.

Let us pray that, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in South Sudan, and in all Africa, the seeds of his Kingdom of love, justice and peace may germinate. Thank you.

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the many student groups present. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Appeal of the Holy Father

My thoughts go, at this time, to the peoples of Turkey and Syria who have been hard hit by the earthquake, which has caused thousands of deaths and injuries. With emotion I pray for them and express my closeness to these peoples, to the families of the victims and to all those who are suffering from this devastating calamity. I thank the relief workers and I encourage everyone to show solidarity with those territories, some of which have already been ravaged by a long war. Let us pray together that these brothers and sisters of ours may move on, overcoming this tragedy, and let us ask Our Lady to protect them: "Ave Maria...".